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## -A CASE HISTORY-

# 17 Years of Ideological Attack on a Cultural Target

By JOHN CORRY

**J**erry Kosinski, the author of 10 books, one a National Book Award winner, another made into a successful movie, has become a man defined by rumors. They shadow him; they envelop him; they say he is a fraud. The most insidious suggest he doesn't write his own books and that he serves the C.I.A. The contradiction is that Mr. Kosinski is a public person, a constant guest on television, a featured actor in the movie "Reds," the subject of scholarly dissertations. Therefore, his life has been examined many times. Still, the rumors persist.

"I must now prove that I even exist," Mr. Kosinski says soberly. When he wakes up now in the morning, he gags. His works are being discredited by rumors because his life is being discredited by rumors. That he is a writer is almost incidental. He is an intellectual, a creative person, under ideological attack. The ideology was born in Eastern Europe, and so were the most damaging rumors. They have been around for 17 years, only now they have grown more insistent.

They came up again last June 22, when a front-page story in The Village Voice said that Mr. Kosinski hired editors who virtually wrote his novels for him. It also said the C.I.A. "apparently played a clandestine role" in the publication of his first two books.

"It is perhaps this dirty little secret," the story said, "that explains the fast shuffle of autobiographical tales making up the Kosinski myth."

The story, picked up and commented on by newspapers around the world, was devastating. It stated, quite explicitly, that Mr. Kosinski

was a liar. It also fed the rumors.

In Hamburg, for example, one of Mr. Kosinski's publishers said it would be unwise for him to visit Germany now because "the press would pay more attention to the articles" inspired by The Village Voice than it would to his last novel. In Paris, a story in the periodical Les Nouvelles Littéraires asked Mr. Kosinski, apparently seriously:

"Why do you always carry arms? Why the dozens of false identities? Why the tear gas bombs in your car? Whom are you afraid of, Jerzy Kosinski?"

And in Warsaw, newspapers cited the story in the American weekly as confirmation of what they had been saying all along: that Mr. Kosinski, an enemy of all things Polish, was a fraud. Accordingly, the rumors and accusations came full circle. Mr. Kosinski, who was born in Poland in 1933, fled from there in 1957. Poland started denouncing him soon after.

Until recently, however, Mr. Kosinski seemed undamaged by the denunciations. He continued to write; he seemed to prosper. His behavior was sometimes bizarre; other writers spoke about his eccentricities — eccentricities that Mr. Kosinski himself boasted about: his hiding places, disguises, even false identities. Was he showing the reflexive actions of a Holocaust survivor? Was he gathering new material for his novels? Or was it possible, just barely, that somehow he was doing both?

Whatever it was, it did not seem to be held against him. In 1973, Mr. Kosinski was elected the president of the American Center of P. E. N., the international association of poets, playwrights, editors, essayists and novelists. The next year he was re-elected, serving the maximum time allowed. When he stepped down, P. E. N.'s board of directors passed a resolution about him. It said, in part:

"He has shown an imaginative and protective sense of responsibility for writers all over the world. No single member of the American Center can possibly be aware of the full extent of his efforts, but it is clear that they have been extraordinary and that the

**N**ow, however, there is a shadow on Mr. Kosinski. His life has been changed. "My political and moral credibility has been damaged," Mr. Kosinski says. "My anti-Communism now becomes nothing but payment for a supposed association with the C.I.A. The core of my life, my spiritual life, is under attack."

"I would be the last person in the world to use the law — to sue The Village Voice," says Mr. Kosinski, a First Amendment absolutist. "My whole dramatic predicament has been individual. What do I do now? Say to society, 'Rescue me.'"

"It's fascinating how the guilt sets in. One's inner reality is eroded, and then comes the panic. I wake up now feeling guilty. How can I prove I am not a member of the C.I.A.? How can I actually prove I have written a book? Of course I know myself, but who can I point it out to? If I write something, they will put a headline on it: 'Jerzy Kosinski still insists he writes his own books.'"

Mr. Kosinski's predicament is not helped by the literary genre in which he writes, or by his apparent predilection for the demimondaine. Critics say his works are autobiographical; he says they are novels. Declare that his works are pure fiction, however, and he will say that everything in them is true.

"Kosinski's life and art have been shaped by two of the most cataclysmic movements in the modern world: Nazism and Stalinist Communism," the Jesuit magazine America said in a laudatory essay a few years ago. "From that dual experience, he has survived with very few verities intact." Certainly, no other novelist has so joined his life and art; no other novelist has had his life so confused with his art. Still, in the litany of rumors and allegations about Mr. Kosinski there is one constant: "The Painted Bird." It is his first and most celebrated novel. The headline in The Village Voice — "Jerzy Kosinski's Tainted Words" — was a reminder.

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